

# Evaluations matter, Fort Hood panel says

Gerry J. Gilmore, American Forces Press Service

## Evaluations matter, Fort Hood panel says

WASHINGTON, Jan. 20, 2010 - Leaders must take action when servicemembers display indicators of committing violence against their comrades, the co-chairs of a review panel appointed to assess the causes of the Fort Hood shootings said here today.

On Nov. 19, Defense Secretary Robert M. Gates appointed former Army Secretary Togo West and retired Navy Adm. Vernon Clark, a former chief of naval operations, to head a review panel to determine, among other things, why an allegedly troubled Army medical officer apparently slipped through the military's evaluation process.

"Evaluations make a difference," West told members of the House Armed Services Committee. "And, we can't do the job of leading or protecting against threats if honest evaluations are not done by those who have the duty, the information and the authority to do so."

The panel provided its report to Gates on Jan. 15.

Much of the report addresses "violence by a servicemember against his or her colleagues," West said.

Army psychiatrist Maj. Nidal Malik Hasan is charged with killing 13 people, 12 military and one civilian, and wounding 43 others during a Nov. 5, 2009, shooting rampage at Fort Hood, Texas.

The alleged assailant was shot and disabled by a Fort Hood civilian police officer, who also was wounded in an exchange of gunfire. Hasan, who is hospitalized and under detention, has been charged with 13 counts of premeditated murder and 32 specifications of attempted premeditated murder under the Uniform Code of Military Justice. The UCMJ is the U.S. military's legal system for servicemembers.

It is imperative, West told committee members, that military leaders be alert to indicators that servicemembers under their charge might commit acts of violence against their comrades.

It's also necessary to document and catalogue such indicators of violence, West said, in order "to make them available for the persons who need to know what are the indicators and where have the indicators been noted, and then to prepare ourselves to act when that evidence is before us; to make it available to our commanders so that they can act, and to be clear about their authority."

Hasan, a Muslim, allegedly became radicalized and complained to colleagues about his role as a U.S. military officer

when he was posted at Walter Reed Army Medical Center here before being assigned to Fort Hood in July 2009.

Gates directed the panel to review military personnel policies, procedures for force protection, and emergency response measures, West said, as well as policies that apply to those who provide medical care to servicemembers.

The panel also was tasked to "take a look at how the Army applied its policies and procedures to the alleged perpetrator," he said.

The military, West told committee members, also needs "to pay attention" to potential dangers as the war against global extremism continues.

"The fact is that we need to understand the forces that cause an individual to radicalize, commit violent acts and thereby to make us vulnerable from within," West said.

A key focus of the review was "on violence that comes from any kind of behavior," Clark told the committee. "But, what we found, especially, was that policies on the internal threat are inadequate."

Prohibited behaviors and actions "need to be addressed," Clark said. And, he said, barriers to information sharing among the chain-of-command need to be removed.

Regulatory guidance on improper servicemember behavior already exists, Clark acknowledged. But, he added, such guidance "is incomplete for the day in which we live."

West and Clark both praised the rapid response provided by Fort Hood's security personnel.

"We were impressed by what we saw at Fort Hood," Clark said, noting the actions of first responders that stopped the alleged shooter "prevented greater loss."

"With that response, lives were saved," West agreed. "And yet, 13 people died; scores more were wounded."

The military, the former Army secretary said, must do a better job of being ready for the unexpected.

20 January 2010